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SELECTED.

THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICE.

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

(Concluded.)

The next that entered was a man beyond the middle age, bearing the look of one who knew the world and his own course in it. He had just alighted from a handsome private carriage, which had orders to wait in the street while its owner transacted his business. This person came up to the desk with a quick, determined step, and looked the Intelligencer in the face with a resolute eye; though, at the same time, some secret trouble gleamed from it in red and dusky light.

"I have an estate to dispose of," said he, with a brevity that seemed characteristic.

"Describe it," said the Intelligencer.

The applicant proceeded to give the boundaries of his property, its nature comprising tillage, pasture, woodland, and pleasure-grounds, in ample circuit; together with a mansion-house, in the construction of which it had been his object to realize a castle in the air, hardening its shadowy walls into granite, and rendering its visionary splendor perceptible to the awakened eye. Judging from his description, it was beautiful enough to vanish like a dream, yet substantial enough to endure for centuries. He spoke, too, of the gorgeous furniture, the refinements of upholstery and all the luxurious artifices that combined to render this a residence where life might flow onward in a stream of golden days, undisturbed by the ruggedness which fate loves to fling into it.

"I am a man of strong will," said he in conclusion; "and at my first setting out in life, as a poor, unfriended youth, I resolved to make myself the possessor of such a mansion and estate as this, together with the abundant revenue necessary to uphold it. I have succeeded to the extent of my utmost wish. And this is the estate which I have now concluded to dispose of."

"And your terms?" asked the Intelligencer, after taking down the particulars with which the stranger had supplied him.

"Easy—abundantly easy!" answered the successful man, smiling, but with a stern and almost frightful contraction of the brow, as if to quell an inward pang. "I have been engaged in various sorts of business—a distiller, a trader to Africa, an East India merchant, a speculator in the stocks—and, in the course of these affairs, have contracted an incumbrance of a certain nature. The purchaser of the estate shall merely be required to assume this burden to himself."

"I understand you," said the Man of Intelligence, putting his pen behind his ear. "I fear that no bargain can be negotiated on these conditions. Very probably, the next possessor may acquire the estate with a similar incumbrance, but it will be of his own contracting, and will not lighten your burden in the least."

"And am I to live on," fiercely exclaimed the stranger, "with the dirt of these accursed acres, and the granite of this infernal mansion, crushing down my soul? How, if I should turn the edifice into an almshouse or a hospital or tear it down and build a church?"

"You can at least make the experiment," said the intelligencer; "but the whole matter is one which you must settle for yourself."

The man of deplorable success withdrew, and got into his coach, which rattled off lightly over the wooden pavements, though laden with the weight of much land, a stately house, ponderous heaps of gold, all compressed into an evil conscience.

There now appeared many applicants for places; among the most note-worthy of whom was a small, smoke-driedfigure, who gave himself out to be one of the bad spirits thathad waited upon Doctor Faustus in his laboratory. He pretended to show a certificate of character, which, he averted, had been given him by that famous necromancer, and countersigned by several masters whom he had subsequently served.

"I am afraid, my good friend," observed the Intelligencer, "that your chance of getting a service is but poor. Now-a-days, men act the evil spirit for themselves and for their neighbors, and play the part more effectually than ninety-nine out of a hundred of your fraternity."

But, just as the poor fiend was assuming a vaporous consistency, being about to vanish through the floor in sad disappointment and chagrin, the editor of a political newspaper chanced to enter the office, in quest of a scribbler of party paragraphs. The former servant of Doctor Faustus, with some misgivings as to his sufficiency of venom, was allowed to try his hand in this capacity. Next appeard, like-wise seeking a service, the mysterious Man in Red, who had aided Bonaparte in his ascent to imperial power. He was examined as to his qualifications by an aspiring politician, but finally rejected, as lacking familiarity with the cunning tactics of the present day.

People continued to succeed each other, with as much briskness as if everybody turned aside, out of the roar and tumult of the city, to record here some want, or superfluity, or desire. Some had goods or possessions, of which they wished to negotiate the sale. A China merchant had lost his health by a long residence in that wasting climate; he very liberally offered his disease, and his wealth along with it, to any physician who would rid him of both together.

A soldier offered his wreath of laurels for as good a leg as that which it had cost him, on the battle-field. One poor weary wretch desired nothing but to be accomodated with any creditable method of laying down his life; for misfortune and pecuniary troubles had so subdued his spirits, that he could no longer conceive the possibility of happiness, nor had the heart to try for it. Nevertheless, happening to overhear some conversation in the Intelligence Office, respecting wealth to be rapidly accumulated by a certain mode of speculation, he resolved to live out this one other experiment of better fortune. Many persons desired to exchange their youthful vices for others better suited to the gravity of advancing age; others, we are glad to say, made earnest efforts to exchange vice for virtue, and, hard as the bargain was, succeeded in effecting it. But it was remarkable that what all were the least willing to give up, even on the most advantageous terms, were the habits, the oddities, the characteristic traits, the little ridiculous indulgences, somewhere between faults and follies, of which nobody but themselves could understand the fascination.

The great folio, in which the man of Intelligence recorded all these freaks of idle hearts, and aspirations of deep hearts, and desperate longings of miserable hearts, and evil prayers of perverted hearts, would be curious reading, were it possible to obtain it for publication. Human character in its individual developments—human nature in the mass—may best be studied in its wishes; and this was the record of them all. There was an endless diversity of mode and circumstance, yet withal such a similarity in the real ground-work, that any one page of the volume—whether written in the days before the Flood, or the yesterday that is just gone by, or to be written on the morrow that is close at hand, or a thousand ages hence—might serve as a specimen of the whole. Not but that there were wild sallies of fantasy that could scarcely occur to more than one man's brain, whether reasonable or lunatic. The strangest wishes—yet most incident to men who had gone deep into scientific pursuits, and attained a high intellectual stage, though not the loftiest—were, to contend with Nature, and wrest from her some power, which she had seen fit to withhold from mortal grasp.—She loves to delude her aspiring students, and mock them with mysteries that seeme but just beyond their utmost reach. To concoct new minerals—to produce new forms of vegetable life—to create an insect, if nothing higher in the living scale—is a sort of wish that has often revelled in the breast of a man of science. An astronomer, who lived far more among the distant worlds of space than in this lower sphere, recorded a wish to behold the opposite side of the moon, which, unless the system of the firmament be reversed, she can never turn towards the earth. On the same page of the volume, was written the wish of a little child, to have the stars for playthings.

The most ordinary wish, that was written down with wearisome recurrence, was, of course, for wealth, wealth, wealth, in sums from a few shillings up to unreckonable thousands. But, in reality, this often repeated expression covered as many different desires. Wealth is the golden essence of the outward world, embodying almost everything that exists beyond the limits of the soul; and therefore it is the natural yearning for the life in the midst of which we find ourselves, and of which gold is the condition of enjoyment, that men abridge into this general wish. Here and there, it is true, the volume testified to some heart so perverted as to desire gold for its own sake, Many wished for power; a strange desire, indeed, since it is but another form of slavery. Old people wished for the delights of youth; a fop, for a fashionable coat; an idle-reader, for a new novel; a versifier, for a rhyme to some stubborn word; a painter, for Titian's secret of coloring; a prince, for a cottage; a republican, for a kingdom and a palace; a libertine, for his neighbor's wife; a man of palate, for green peas; and a poor man, for a crust of bread. The ambitious desires of public men, elsewhere so crafty concealed, were here expressed openly and boldly, side by side with the unselfish wishes of the philanthropist, for the welfare of of the race, so beautiful, so comforting, in contrast with the egotism that continually weighed self against the world. Into the darker secrets of the Book of Wishes, we will not penetrate.

It would be an instructive employment for a student of mankind, perusing this volume carefully, and comparing its records with men's perfected designs, as expressed in their deeds and daily life, to ascertain how far the one accorded with the other. Undoubtedly, in most cases, the correspondence would be found remote. The holy and generous wish, that rises like incense from a pure heart towards heaven, often lavished its sweet perfume on the blast of evil times. The foul, selfish, murderous wish, that steams forth from a corrupted heart, often passes into the spiritual atmosphere, without being concreted into an earthly deed. Yet this volume is probable truer, as a representation of the human heart, than is the living drama of action, as it evolves around us. There is more of good and more of evil in it; more redeeming points of the bad, and more errors of the virtuous; higher up-soarings, and baser degradation of the soul; in short, a more perplexing amalgamation of vice and and virtue, than we witness in the ontward world. Decency, and external conscience, often produce a far fairer outside, than is warranted by the stains within. And be it owned, on the other hand, that a man seldom repeats to his nearest friend, any more than he realises in act, the purest wishes, which, at some blessed time or other, have arisen from the depths of his nature, and witnessed for him in this volume. Yet there is enough, on every leaf, to make good man shudder for his own wild and idle wishes, as well as for the sinner, whose whole life is the incarnation of a wicked desire.

But again the door is opened; and we hear the tumultuous stir of the world—a deep and awful sound, expressing in another form, some portion of what is written in the volume that lies before the Man of Intelligence. A grandfatherly personage tottered hastily into the office, with such an earnestness in his infirm alacrity that his white hair floated backward, as he hurried up to the desk; while his dim eyes caught a momentary lustre from his vehemence of purpose. This venerable figure explained that he was in search of To-morrow.

"I have spent all my life in pursuit of it," added the sage old gentleman, "being assured that To-morrow has some vast benefit or other in store for me. But I am now getting a little in years, and must make haste; for unless I overtake To-morrow soon, I begin to be afraid it will finally escape me."

"This fugitive To-morrow, my venerable friend," said the Man of Intelligence, "is a stray child of Time, and is flying from his father into the region of the infinite. Continue your pursuit, and you will doubtless come up with him; but as to the earthly gifts which you expect, he has scattered them all among a throng of Yesterdays."

Obliged to content himself with this enigmatical response, the grandsire hastened forth, with a quick clatter of his staff upon the floor; and as he disappeared, a little boy scampered through the door in chase of a butterfly, which had got astray amid the barren sunshine of the city. Had the old gentleman been shrewder, he might have detected To-morrow under the semblance of that gaudy insect. The golden butterfly glistened through the shadowy apartment, and brushed its wings against the Book of Wishes, and fluttred forth again with the ehild still in pursuit.

A man now entered, in neglected attire, with the aspect of a thinker, but somewhat too rough-hewn and brawny for a scholar. His face was full of sturdy vigor, with some finer and keener attribute beneath; though harsh at first, it was tempered with the glow of a large, warm heart, which had force enough to heat his powerful intellect through and through. He advanced to the Intelligencer, and looked at him with a glance of such stern sincerity, that perhaps few secrets were beyond its scope.

"I seek for Truth," said he.

"It is precisely the most rare pursuit that has ever come under my cognizance," replied the Intelligencer, as he made the new inscription in his volume. "Most men seek to impose some cunning falshood upon themselves for truth. But I can lend no help to your researches, You must achieve the miracle for yourself. At some fortunate moment, you may find Truth at your side—or, perhaps, she may be mistily discerned, far in advance—or, possibly, behind you."

"Not behind me," said the seeker, "for I have left nothing on my track without a through investigation. She flits before me, passing now through a naked solitude, and now mingling with the throng of a popular assembly, and now writing with the pen of a French philosopher, and now standing at the alter of an old cathedral, in the guise of a Catholic priest, performing the high mass. Oh weary search! But I must not falter; and surely my heart-deep quest of Truth shall avail at last."

He paused, and fixed his eyes upon the Intelligencer, with a depth of investigation that seemed to hold commerce with the inner nature of this being, wholly regardless of his external development.

"And what are you?" said he. "It will not satisfy me to point to this fantastic show of an Intelligence Office, and this mockery of business. Tell me what is beneath it, and what your real agency in life, and your influence upon mankind?"

"Yours is a mind," answered the Man of Intelligence, "before which the forms and fantasies that conceal the inner idea from the multitude, vanish at once, and leave the naked reality beneath. Know, then, the secret. My agency in worldly action—my connection with the press, and tumult, and intermingling, and development of human affairs—is merely delusive. The desire of man's heart does for him whatever I seem to do. I am no minister of action, but the Recording Spirit?"

What further secrets were then spoken, remains a mystery inasmuch as the roar of the city, the bustle of human business, the outcry of the jostling masses, the rush and tumult of man's life, in its noisy and brief career, arose so high that it drowned the words of these two talkers. And whether they stood talking in the Moon, or in Vanity Fair, or in a city of this actual world, is more than I can say.

A Good Book and a Good Woman.—are excellent things for those who know how justly to appreciate their value. There are men, however who judge both from the beauty of their covering.

Thrilling Oratory.—They have some brave orators out west—that fact there is no disputing, if we admit that the reporters translate them aright, and of course they "don't do anything else," as the following specimen of lofty and burning eloquence will testify:

"Americans! This is a great country—wide—vast—and in the southwest, unlimited. Our Republic is yet destined to *re-annex* all South America—to occupy the Russian possessions, and again to recover possession of those British provinces, which, the prowess of the old thirteen colonies won from the French on the plains of Abraham! all rightfully ours to *re-occupy*. Ours is a great and growing country. Faneuil Hall was its Cradle! but whar—whar will be found timber enough for its coffin? Scoop all the water out of the Atlantic Ocean, and its bed would not afford a grave sufficient for its corpse. And yet America has scarcely grown out of the gristle of boyhood. Europe! what is Europe? She is no whar; nothing; a circumstance; a cypher; a mere obsolete idea. We have faster steamboats, swifter locomotives, larger creeks, bigger plantations, better mill privileges; broader lakes, higher mountains, deeper cataracts, louder thunder, forkeder lightning, braver men, handsomer *weemen*, and more money than England *dar* have! [Thunders of applause.] Who is afraid?"